

‘...figure out what we need to do better’

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Does the Clarksburg saga demonstrate that the county’s planning process is broken? We are inundated daily with reports charging errors from top to bottom. Fingers are pointing everywhere, and few answers have been provided.

While the various investigative bodies (the County Council’s own Office of Legislative Oversight, the Inspector General, and the state prosecutor) examine the details, I propose we take a big breath, step back and look at the bigger picture.

The Department of Park and Planning has already begun addressing some needed management improvements. The pending investigations will no doubt recommend further repairs. The Montgomery County Civic Federation has made a proposal, as has the county executive in concert with the planning board. These are good first steps, but will they be enough? Before we take further action, we need to think about where we need to go with this. Let’s do it right.

Right now, everyone is unhappy. Civic groups demand more process and transparency. Builders want certainty, clarity and less red tape. Everyone wants accountability. But how?

Are our requirements and visions so complex that they cannot be effectively enforced? Do we need to return to a simpler era of reduced expectations and diminished planning results? Or do we have the wherewithal to create systems that better integrate the latest standards with modern day reality? Can we create effective coordination between the executive branch and park and planning, while maintaining the independence of the planning process? Are we assigning the right tasks to the right people? Do we have too many ideas and not enough action? It is time to address these questions directly so we can move on.

Let’s see where we all agree, fix what’s broken, and figure out what we need to do better.

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The writer, a Democrat, is an at-large member of the Montgomery County Council. She is working with community organizations to sponsor a forum on what is needed for the county’s planning structure.